

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

May 15, 2003

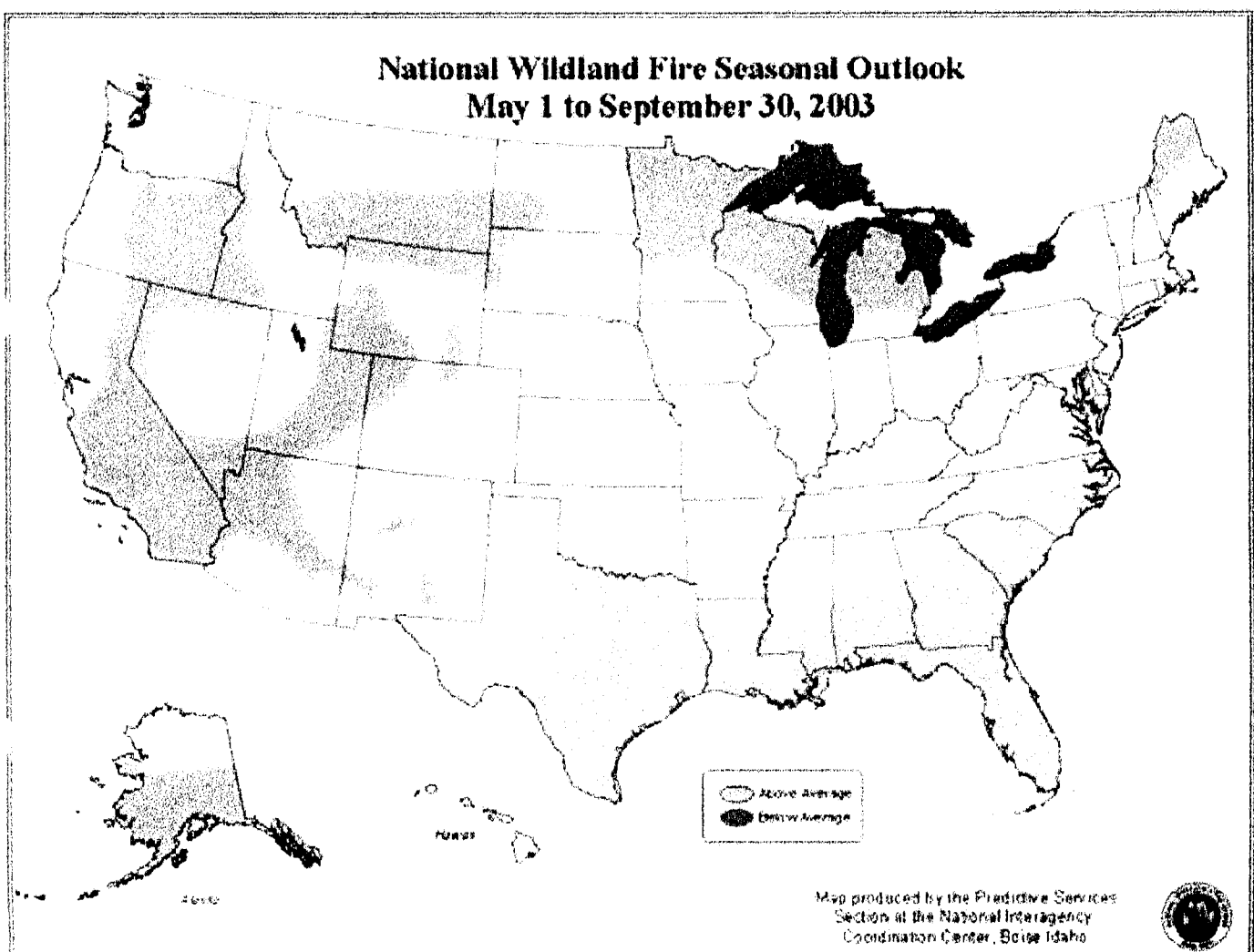
2003 Wildfire Outlook

Learn From History

Dear Colleague:

Experts at the National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC) in Boise, Idaho, indicate that the long term drought continues to persist over much of the interior West. Mountain snow pack and precipitation remain below average for most of the western states with the exception of northern and central California. Unless the weather patterns provide relief, 2003 has the potential to be an above normal fire season for **much of the interior West, south/central Alaska, portions of California, western Great Lake States and northern Maine.**

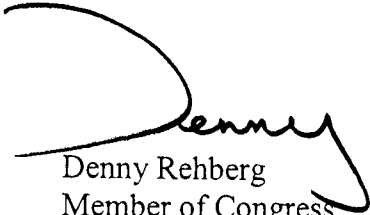
- Drought stressed and/or insect damaged vegetation is becoming more prevalent across the western states and will increase the potential for large, destructive wildfires at mid to high elevations.
- Several large fires have already occurred in the Great Lake States this spring due to limited winter snowfall, which left herbaceous fuels receptive to ignition. As spring progresses, peat fires in these areas are expected to be problematic due to dry conditions.
- Early snow melt is anticipated for the Pacific Northwest, Great Basin, Alaska, and other areas which will cause large dead/downed fuel moistures to drop below critical values earlier than normal in higher elevation areas, resulting in an early and extended fire season.
- The Southern Area is expecting a below normal fire season through the remainder of their spring fire season. Forecasts continue to call for a very active tropical storm season, which could result in an above average number of hurricanes that could impact the area through the summer months.
- An early spring prescribed fire season is expected across many western states.



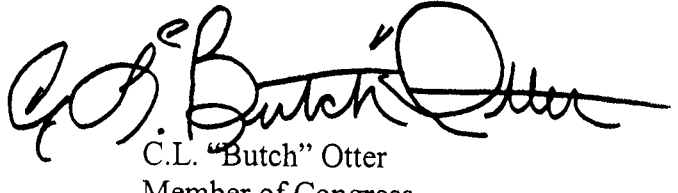
Take A New Path

Drought conditions and dense vegetation increase the risk of wildfires that burn longer, faster, and more intense. These catastrophic fires cause incalculable harm air quality, water quality, forest ecosystems, and threatened and endangered species and their habitat. We know that fire historically played a positive role in maintaining ecological stability. Due to the degraded condition of many forests and grasslands, use of fire for forest management has become much more complex. It requires scientific support and new tools to help **plan, implement, and monitor fire management activities**. One of these tools is the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003. We urge you to support this critical legislation.


Sincerely,



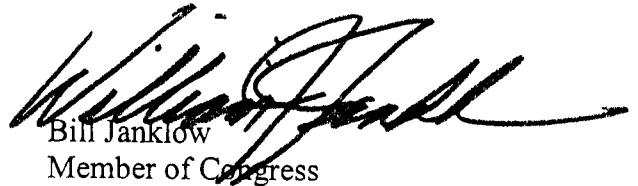
Denny Rehberg
Member of Congress



C.L. "Butch" Otter
Member of Congress



Mike Simpson
Member of Congress



Bill Janklow
Member of Congress